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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1144
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4579
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1317
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SUBJECT: DEMARCATION AND NORMALIZATION: A KERNAL OF HOPE
FROM THE GSE?

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (C) On June 6, MFA Director General for the Americas and UN Ghirmai Ghebremariam requested a meeting with the Ambassador to express GSE concerns about the June 2nd VOA interview of DAS Yamamoto. Ghirmai claimed to be troubled by DAS Yamamoto's statement that the failure of the parties to resolve issues associated with villages split by the new border line, risked planting the seeds for future conflict. This, he said, echoed the position of Ethiopian PM Meles. In response the Ambassador declined to accept Ghirmai's assertion, noting that this was merely a reaffirmation of what we have been saying for some time; that we are not arguing to change the delimitation line to avoid splitting the villages, but we do believe that the parties must ultimately decide what they will do to deal with the impact that splitting a village would have.

¶2. (C) Ghirmai, then offered a surprising rejoinder. He acknowledged that the GSE realized that demarcation may split villages or towns (though he quibbled over the number) and he acknowledged that the GSE "can understand" that this could be a problem. However, he suggested that these issues could be addressed as demarcation unfolds. Noting that the villages affected are small to begin with, he argued that the GSE was not going to worry about having to adjust the delimitation line to keep the village intact. "No one is going to divide a church," he claimed. Ghirmai, reiterated that these issues could be addressed as demarcation proceeds. He also commented twice on DAS Yamamoto's comment that normalization was a necessary part of the search for peace, saying that the GSE "has no problems with normalization" -- although he added the caveat that normalization should nonetheless not be a precondition for demarcation.

¶3. (C) Comment: In voicing his concerns about DAS Yamamoto's interview, Ghirmai's delivery was half-hearted at best. But when he followed his complaint with a nonchalant, shoulder-shrugging assurance that of course the "split village" question could be easily resolved by adjusting the delimitation line -- which has always been sacrosanct for the GSE he did get our attention. Equally his repeated, and equally off-hand acceptance of Yamamoto's call for normalization as "OK" so long as it is not part of

a precondition to demarcation, was also a new nuance in the GSE position. Whether this is the first kernel of hope regarding a new GSE approach remains to be seen. In that regard, the messenger must be considered. In a few weeks, Ghirmai will be the new Eritrean Ambassador to the United States and he has, in any event, traditionally been one of our most reasonable and sympathetic interlocutors in the GSE. Nonetheless, he has seldom strayed from the party line and has generally been the channel through which messages from the Office of the President are delivered. As is the norm here, we will continue to read these and other tea leaves to try and assess whether we are seeing a true shift of GSE perspective or not. End Comment.

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